

Quarters

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Does He Treat You All Right?

• H. E. Francis

Yes, he treats me all right, his mother said.

Still Ed was away; he was on a skimmer boat, trying to pick up a few bucks—there was no unemployment check. He hadn't been out of the navy that long; she'd paid his bachelor bills right after they were married, and there was no money. For a time he worked at construction, but with winter the ground was too hard, jobs were cut, and he hadn't worked long enough to be able to collect.

When the phone rang, he sat while she talked. Ed? she said, without even waiting to hear the voice. She knew. The conversation lasted five minutes.

He huddled close to the oil heater—it was used for the whole house that winter, all that she dared to open, because they were short on money: kitchen and bath; on rare nights, the living room. They had moved the TV into the kitchen. She had a suspicion about using that too much.

He's in Brooklyn, she said. The engine's given out he says.

She didn't comment on the call otherwise.

He could have sent a card.

He thought it would take too long. Besides, he'd be back by then.

And it would have saved money. Calls cost.

She didn't argue the point. Facts she was quite familiar with. Nor did she sit down. She kept moving as if

some mechanism in her would not wind down.

Well, I guess it's all right, if he treats you okay.

Yes, she said.

It was the thing he worried about all through college. Besides, he was still angry about last week. There had been no one in the house when he came. He couldn't get in the front door because it was locked, and when he entered the back, after having found the key in the clothespin bag, because she was out and he had to wait all day, he sized the situation up pretty well.

How about some soup? There's some in the closet behind you—on the second shelf.

What kind? he said.

Whatever you like—it's your last meal with me. And she laughed. Her hand went up to the window in the direction of the train station. Outside, a slow sea of blue dark began to pour up over the island.

And what will you do? he said. The can was solid in his hand. Mushroom?

That's good. Oh—I didn't know about the green beans—and there's Boston beans up there too. I could make some hot cereal. Not quite the thing for a send-off, is it?

The darkness veiled her and made her young—it would be hard to tell she was fifteen years older than Ed.

Soup's fine.

She lit the gas—he knew it was hard on her, she was too generous.

We could have cold beans, he said. Will you miss me? *I* get used to you when you stay long. It's not so bad when it's a week like this; then I don't know you've ever been—really. How much time have you got left?

About an hour or so. I'll call a taxi. No need to rush.

Eat your soup. Here—the roll's buttered.

It was hard to imagine that the house had ever been part of him. For a week he had been a stranger in it. Worse, it held him like a hand whose finger wouldn't open. Between the cracks, the days had gone by, a week of dark blue sky, pelting rain, and winds that tore over the flat lands from the sea. In an hour the walls would be gone.

You'd better call the taxi early—make sure he's free. We've only got one here, remember. The others go when the tourists leave. I'll do the dishes.

He made the call.

The taxi will be here twenty minutes before train time.

She did not answer. She was swishing the water into suds. But she had heard—she was staring out the window, through the leafless elms across the barren land, in the direction of the city. The elm branches flailed in stubborn fingers against the sky. While she watched, the water ran over. She saw him standing still watching her watch the sky, and she said, Ahhh, I've let the suds wash over. Well—

And then he asked her again, What will you do?

Oh, I'll be all right. There's Ella—she always needs company. I can stay with her a few days. And Myra's always calling.

The phone hadn't rung all this

week. Neither of them liked her husband—her preference for him was an act of treachery. She had betrayed friends her own age by marrying him. And they had not forgotten. Especially at times like this.

Or I could go to Riverhead. To Pattie's.

Pattie was the girl friend of her youth. They'd seen each other married to their own old beaus, shared the birth of children, and some deaths; and though Pattie's house was not the place it used to be before Wilson retired from the gas works and started to drink up their savings, it was still Pattie, she had the soft, beautiful hands of her youth—never did a stitch of work (it gave her such pride to speak of Pattie that way—soft hands, so beautiful—never a stitch of work). The words rang in his memory.

How will you get there?

Maybe they'll come after me.

Well, then, maybe you'd better come with me—on the train. Ride as far as Riverhead. Before it snows. It may. How will that be?

She held the dish up as if testing the rim for dirt. Her eyes leveled over it at the grappling tree.

Fine, she said. She smiled at him in the pane, without turning, and he went to pack. It'll only take me a minute to get ready. There's nothing much to take. I'll be back here in a few days.

When he came down from the cold upstairs room with his bag, she was ready, excepting her coat, and she was checking her purse. I guess I've got everything, she said. Check the taps and the gas. I've got my keys—yes. I'd better make sure his key's in the back entry.

He heard her shuffling about.

Didn't he leave you with any money?

There wasn't much.

Did he have any?

She didn't answer so he did not pursue it further. By the time she got her coat on and checked her face in the mirror, the taxi honked outside; she took his hand and squeezed. Come on, she said—like a girl on her first trip. And she was different. She walked with a vibrant energy. The wind made her laugh, she drew it in deep—he could tell—and getting into the taxi himself, he was proud of the quick whiff of scent and the wind-clean smell of her as he slid in beside her.

The thirty miles to Riverhead were silent between them. Alternately the thick heat doped them and the violent jostling threw them against one another and kept them from dozing. The train might have seemed vicious, but they did not notice. He stared away from her into the pane, but he saw her there again—her eyes, as he did in the house (they might have been the same panes), a phantom he could see through into the night, with the stars piercing her image. She caught his eye and her hand touched his and she said, Maybe next year?

I guess so, he said, but his own eye was ahead now and his ear half listening—and then a small huddle of lights indicated the town in the distance, and the white fingers of light crept toward them. For a moment the night was pushed back. A door wrenched open, a freezing draft smacked their legs, bits of paper flew.

Riverrrrrr-head. The conductor passed and wrenched open the rear door, which he let wham shut.

She was standing. Well—

He got up too. The train slowed.

She was the only one who was getting off.

Well, he said, and opened the door for her.

It feels good, she said, but it was icy; it sent thorns into the heart, and his breath caught.

He put his arm around her and kissed her, and for an instant she clung, then she said, Well—

At that moment, instinctively, he pulled his hand out—he had had the money crumpled so long that it was wet, and he handed it to her. It isn't much. Five dollars. But, well—She looked up without speaking—and touched her lips to his cheek. But her hand rubbed the bill, though she didn't look. She was feeling how wet it was. Then she put it in her purse; the porter reached his hand up for her, she stepped down, and the train, almost instantly, started again as the conductor shouted. All *abooooouuhhhd*.

Quickly he went back in, hoping to see her through the pane. He moved rapidly down into the next car. There she was—standing there smiling, not waving. Then, when she knew he saw her—she nodded—she turned and walked off quite rapidly. The lights swept past. The night came over in a deep, dark wave without the least trace of light, and he sat down, hunched his shoulders deep into his overcoat, closed his eyes, and prepared to spend the remaining two and a half hours sleeping.

Occasionally he shrugged; the station stops and the unceasing jolts jarred, but he managed at least to keep his eyes shut, though he did not sleep—there was a cold draft by the window, which numbed his left arm. And his hand over the money in his pocket, which he always carried loose, kept his mind going. It wasn't

a lot of money—enough to spend the night in the city and see a play or two, and besides he had saved it for a long time for just this purpose.

He kept his eyes closed as long as he could—and once he almost slept. Closer to the city, someone sat beside him, a girl about twenty-five, though he was hardly aware that she was there until he felt the hand flop over on his arm and lie there—it made him start; he opened his eyes and looked at it—it was still, scarcely pressing, just lying there, and he felt nothing. Then slowly, warmth penetrated his sleeve. He stared; the longer he stared, the warmer it grew. It was only an instant before he felt it was touch—he looked up at the girl: she was sleeping or had her eyes closed. He jerked away suddenly, so violent that her eyes flicked starkly open—their eyes met, harsh. She

pulled her hand in and stood. He stared again—at his arm, then up at her. She was frightened, and she moved hurriedly down the aisle and out into the next car. After—even through the dust and cigarette butts on the floor—he could see her long legs and the bulge of her under the coat, so he tore his eyes away from the aisle and fixed them in the window, surprised to confront himself there, a pale gray shadow through which the night reached, a face thin and flat and empty, with the eyes he'd carried down from his mother's family glittering like thin, piercing lights thrown back at him from the darkness. And he let go of the money in his pocket, reached up and jerked the hard shade down over the black, and closed his blurring eyes to keep the ceiling light from glaring so sharply off the dirty yellow shade.

Poem

• Kay Lynn Wells

a white patent leather car
winked at me and
said "have some?"
as he offered me
a cup of Happiness
but
i had just eaten
some despair
and was full
so i refused
and the bus rolled on
at 50 miles per hour
and
eventually i lost
my ticket,
meeting a nice bus driver
who let me ride
to hell
free.

What She Did Not Know

• John C. Hoy

Caught in the sun and wind
breathless to destroy living bone
barefooted across the sea ledge
rock pressed to our tender feet
rubbing its eyelids in our heels.

Startled she ran
over those million motes
soft-white becoming destructible
flesh upon coastal stone.

Aware of my own awareness
I stretch and climb after her
loosening the child I thought
was dead within my limbs.

I press her waist
lifting her up
sensing two children
slip from the touch of us.

Picking up a wreath of kelp
I place it on her head.
Such green in her hair
becomes her. Wind's thread.

She tosses it off laughing.
A laugh is sucked out to sea.
The gesture turns splashing within me
my hands hang awkward.

At our feet, the remnants of a feast,
bleached and delicate
rot of a good time,
are of white inconsequence.

The child in me muffles a cry
to a black-back gull.
She looks where he labors
gently pulling
the cord of the wind.

Mimesis

• Sister Maura, S.S.N.D.

Out of our visible agony: the good betrayed by the equally good; each executing for God's dear law his clumsy scarring of creaturehood; out of the doltish clatter of rickety duty proclaimed and reaffirmed to the straightjackets which confine the kindly maimed; out of the consequential stupidities I am guilty of some angel of annunciation infiltrates the dark with love.

Sometimes I understand. Briefly.

Once I saw Jonah rising on honey light eased by a sculptor from a sycamore branch struck down on a stormy night.

Winter Poem

• Larry Rubin

One tree in winter traces all the hope Our lives can know: A dark rise, naked to the bole, And then that bare curve at the top, The blunted apex, falling like a sigh, A leafless arc to measure all below.

One sky in winter blazes all the stars Our eyes can know: Comets splintered into silver sparks, Chilled as in a frozen spray, vaporized By our very breath, lighting a world Where silence scrapes the bounds of sky and snow.

One glance in winter measures all the fires Our earth can know: Kindled higher than the ice of stars, Burning deeper than the roots of snow.

A Place of Need

• Robert Joe Stout

They were helping fat, old Mrs. Chezholtz into the back seat of the coupe. Joseph watched, erect and unconcerned despite the rain and the little rivulets of water sliding from the brim of his hat onto the collar of his tan trench coat. Gold was inside the car, pulling, and Mrs. Gaitskell was holding Mrs. Chezholtz's cane and pushing from the outside. The fat woman's enormous wriggling rump was getting spattered with rain. Joseph secretly hoped she was wedged there permanently.

Finally, with an explosive grunt, Mrs. Chezholtz lurched through the doorframe. When they had her arranged inside the car, Mrs. Gaitskell turned to Joseph. "All right, Mr. Roosenberg. You can get in now."

"No," he said, stiff and unmoving, "I'm not going."

"But, Mr. Roosenberg, we're all going together." Mrs. Gaitskell smiled, adjusting her tone as though speaking to a child. She was a strong woman, barely past forty, with a long, smooth face and piercing gray eyes. Joseph couldn't remember why she didn't have a husband, although someone had once told him. "You don't want to get caught in the flood, do you?"

With carefully deliberate movement, he took a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his cheeks and mouth and nose. Putting it back, he faced Mrs. Gaitskell, feeling a twinge of victory at seeing her mouth twist impatiently. "I shall go later,"

he said, "when you return for Johnny and the rest of the things."

He avoided the glare of her hard eyes, watching instead the long strings of rain form on the brim of his hat and, breaking, bounce past his face. "All right, Mr. Roosenberg," he heard her say, "that will be about two hours." He watched her get into the car, then call to him through the window, "You don't stay in the rain, will you?"

With a nod he assured her he wouldn't and stood by the street until the car slushed away. Wiping his face with the handkerchief again, he turned to go down the walk past the apricot trees to the house. "Stay out of the rain," he said to himself.

Why?

The question bothered him. He stared at the old high-gabled house. Mrs. Gaitskell had explained to him about the flood. He had listened, mind focused forward to concentrate on her words, but the vague sourceless impression that he had been through this before blurred the fringes of his consciousness and coaxed his concentration inward, where it dissipated and became lost. Rain and the smell of wet leaves. He groped with his hands, trying to follow the feeling through to completion, but the sensations skittered away from his control. Shaking his head, he sighed.

Then he remembered why he hadn't gone with Mrs. Gaitskell and the others to the charity hospital in Conger, forty miles away, to wait out

the flood. Turning away from the house, he started slowly walking toward town.

The hamburger stand was deserted. He placed his hat carefully on a table beneath the overhanging eave and sat down on the bench beside it, his back against the wall of the building.

He had not wanted to go with Mrs. Gaitskell and the others. "Stubborn old man!" Mrs. Gaitskell had hissed once when he opposed her. He did not want to escape from the flood. "Stay out of the rain," she'd told him. Why? He'd been in the rain many times before.

Again, just as the memory began to form, his mind slid away and could not grasp it. Unfastening the top button on his trench coat, he mechanically inspected his pockets. His fountain pen was in place, clipped to the inside pocket of his suitcoat; beside it, his afternoon cigar. On the opposite side, his billfold. Extracting it, he withdrew a small white card and held it between strong bony fingers to read.

Joseph J. Roosenberg

M/Sgt. U. S. Army (Retired)

Laying it on the table in front of him, he uncapped his fountain pen. I should write something, he thought. Just before they did, men always have something to write.

He cocked his head and stared at a magnolia leaf floating in a puddle of water. Yes, that's why he had come — to die. The others were escaping from the flood, but he was sitting where no one would find him, waiting to die.

He could not think of anything to write. The incessant rain surrounded him, endless, endless, absorbing

everything into its gray, rhythmic inconsistency.

Night came easily and early, and Joseph began to feel chilled. He looked at his hand, resting on the table with the fountain pen still between his fingers, and wondered if he had been sleeping. No, he thought, shaking his head slightly. Watching the rain, feeling the chill grow deeper stirred something vague and familiar through his blood.

He lifted his head and looked at the card he had let fall on the table. Thin, curved pen lines were doodled around the corners, surrounding one carefully-lettered word: *Hensch*. He stared at it, uncomprehending; then a slow succession of glowing vibration flushed through his cheeks. *Hensch*—Captain William Hensch. Waiting in the rain, overcoats buttoned around their throats and rifles covered to keep them dry. Where? He clutched his hand around the fountain pen and stabbed it at the rain. Where? A series of impressions toppled into the vacuum, names and places, outline of people, buildings, landscapes. He could not grasp them or sort them and was left with one picture, a mirror-image of himself, sitting in an armchair at the home the day he arrived, telling Mrs. Gaitskell and Mr. Gold and Mr. Barrera, who had died the next month, about the places he'd been. Master Sergeant Roosenberg, Joseph J., Retired; he had told them the stories so many times he'd gotten them confused. Soon they knew better than he where he'd been and what he'd done, and they interrupted him, teasing that he'd never really been anywhere and had only read about those places in books.

He got up quickly and walked away from the hamburger stand. Their con-

stant teasing had embarrassed him and made him angry; he had not spoken to them for a long time afterward and had remained protected and silent, aloof from their petty chattering.

Slowly the burst of anger faded, and he tempered his walk to a more natural gait. There were no lights anywhere around him, and he could not distinguish any familiar buildings or houses. He decided to go back to the hamburger stand and turned around but did not seem to be walking in the right direction. At a corner he turned to his left. The steady rain drove a tightening chill through his lungs; despite his trench coat he could feel his shoulders getting damp. He turned again and stopped three or four times to listen for some distinguishing sound, but the rain hung a heavy shroud over his senses. Bewildered, he continued without paying attention to distance or direction.

A car, headlights dimmed into orange halos by the rain, droned toward him. He stood facing it, erect and frowning. When it stopped beside him, he bent forward to ask the driver to repeat the shouted question he'd been unable to understand.

"... going ... dark, bad to be ... just don't think ... anywhere you ..." A muddle of deep-throated confusion Joseph couldn't piece together. Slowly wiping the rain from his cheeks and mouth with his fingers, he explained that the others from the home had gone to Conger.

"Conger," the man interrupted, hearing only the one word. He mumbled something about Beaupres and then, rolling the window down more, shouted, "Bus station?"

"Bus station," Joseph repeated, trying to comprehend.

"Fine!" the man shouted. "We'll drop you off there. Get in!"

A flurry of waterdrops spattered against the man's face as Joseph shook his head. Immediately he felt ashamed and, smiling weakly, tried to apologize.

"Get in!" the man shouted again. A woman in the back seat opened the door for Joseph, and he squirmed in beside her. Another woman was sitting in the front seat and a little boy, his face and head obscured by an enormous stocking cap, stood between her and the driver. Two other children were in the back. They all seemed to be talking, but Joseph could not understand any of them.

They had gone such a short distance he did not recognize the bus station until the driver had asked him a second time if he wanted to get out.

Some women in Salvation Army dresses were behind the counter, giving free coffee and sandwiches. Joseph took a cup and found a place on a bench, removing his wet trench coat and spreading it on the seat beside him. His legs were tired and his mind slurred into comforting, thoughtless darkness. Intending only to close his eyes, he went to sleep.

"Wake up! Wake up!" The huge puffy woman-face filled his vision as he fumbled out of the fog and blur into consciousness. Her hand was shaking his shoulder; as she leaned closer, her mouth disgorged a ponderous flow of unintelligible verbiage. Finally, he understood that she was telling him to hurry, that a bus was leaving, that he must wake up. He tried to rise, but his joints were so stiff he couldn't move. "Hurry! Hurry!" she roared, and in desperation he pressed his hands against the

little wooden armrests and lunged to his feet.

"Your raincoat!"

"Oh, yes. My raincoat. Thank you." He picked it up and tried to put it on. His fingers, still numb from the poor circulation of sleep, would not conceal it and it fell to the floor. The lady picked it up for him, smiling impatiently, and held it while he pushed his arms through his sleeves. "Thank you," he said and followed her to the bus.

He took a seat near the back. Bewildered, he sat quietly, pretending to be alert. Rain streaked down the windowpanes in unending streams. Suddenly he remembered. Mrs. Gait-skell! She had told him not to stay in the rain. He had to get back to the home. She would be expecting him and would be angry if she had to wait.

He stepped forward to tell the driver to let him off, but the bus was already moving.

Slowly he sat down again. He didn't even know where he was going. The bus moved with a bouncing, jerky rhythm, and he felt his chin sag against his chest.

The voices came to him in a dream.

"Yes, isn't it terrible? It's the snowpack. This warm weather has caused it to melt, and—"

"The highest it's been in sixty-some years. I hope Coyoke doesn't get flooded, too. I have relatives there, and if they—"

"Well, if they'd put that Wind River dam in instead of just talking about it—it's those assemblymen from Los Angeles that are holding it up. They don't realize our property—"

"And my little girl's in Wejichee

City. I hope she'll be all right there. So many people are—"

Gradually the voices from the dream became the voices of people around him. He opened his eyes. His arms and back and legs were stiff, so stiff he could barely move them.

The bus turned and bumped over a rise and stopped. Outside the window, Joseph could see a big, lighted building, like an armory or a barracks command post. The driver got up and said, "Here we are" in a coarse voice, and the passengers got up to leave the bus.

The building was a gymnasium, filled with refugees from the flood. Near the entrance, a small table had been set up; a woman in a Salvation Army uniform was sitting behind it, writing down the names of the people as they came into the building. He waited to be last and approached the table smiling, trying to push forward an air of kindness and consideration.

"Hello," she said, leaning back in the chair a moment. A quick sliver of pleasure sent warmth through his stiffened limbs; he let his shoulders relax forward slightly and shuffled his feet, uncomfortable standing before her but happy that she had greeted him informally. Her plump face, although shaded with indrawn tightness from having worked long hours, looked as though it could be cheerful.

"Roosenberg, Joseph J." He pronounced his name distinctly, giving equal emphasis to all the syllables, and watched her lean forward again, stretching her fingers together before picking up the pen.

"Rudenbert?"

"Roosenberg," he repeated. From his wallet he extracted one of his cards and handed it to her. She read

it, smiled, and looked at him, her eyes momentarily unshielding, darting a flicker of mingled curiosity and amusement against his attempt at friendliness. She wrote his name in the ledger. "Are you from Wejichee City, Sergeant Roosenberg?"

"Yes," he answered, fully dignified, pleased that she had used the outworn title, and gave her the address of the home.

"Is there anyone in Coyoke you want to contact?"

"No."

"You can stay here in the gymnasium, then, if you wish. There are cots and blankets, and the men's dressing room is through the door over there."

"Thank you," he acknowledged. Avoiding the direct contact of her eyes, he edged away from the table, glancing behind to make sure no one was waiting. He could not think of anything to say, yet wanted to prolong the association their few words of conversation had established.

"It must seem very familiar to you." The Salvation Army woman spoke with a slow, disinterested friendliness. "Seeing refugees, I mean."

Gravely frowning, Joseph nodded. "Very familiar," he heard his own thin voice echo. Again the images were pressing outward, indistinct and unintelligible. Without being able to remember anything definite, he slid backwards, into the feeling of perception of recalled touches, tastes. "Very familiar," he echoed again, drawn away from his inward search by her examining eyes. He raised one hand, feebly attempting to describe his mood, then folded it with his other against his belt.

"It's good," she began, "that you—" Interrupted by the arrival of a

family, bundled in raincoats and glancing self-consciously at the gymnasium, as though embarrassed and ashamed to be there, she turned away and began her routine of questions again.

Disappointed at not getting to talk longer, Joseph drifted away, his mind returning inward to his feelings, to the ungrasping desires probing to bring themselves into memory. His legs were stiff, and he had to breathe in slow, short gasps. Occasionally one of the men would glance up to smile or nod, or perhaps shake his head and say something about the unrelenting rain. Joseph answered curtly but with attention that passed for concern and amiability. The excitement of being at the point of discovery, of revelation, deepened; the gymnasium appeared in double focus, as though the past were transposed over the present, all the lines and figures dulled into a hazy, shaded repetition of scenes.

He drank a cup of coffee and went back among the people to choose a cot for himself. There were many children there, most of them restless and whimpering, and Joseph felt sorry for them but he could not think of anything to do to make it better for them. He wished he had some candy.

Children—brown Indian children with puffy faces. Blinking his eyes, he looked more closely. These were not Indian children, and they did not have the stoic, sad reserve that pierced an onlooker's stomach, made him lose himself to an overwhelming desire to be kind. Joseph frowned, listening to the rain, hearing a bus or truck grind gears and accelerate to a slower speed somewhere outside. Waiting, waiting for trucks, for food. Again he blinked his eyes but could

not squeeze the impression any more lucidly into consciousness.

Finally he found a cot and, near it, a place to hang his trench coat. His back and legs were still so stiff he could not bend far enough to untie his shoes, so he lay down without taking them off. He tried to close his eyes but the nerves of his stomach would not relax, and finally he forced himself into a sitting position again. Indian children, blankets, and food. Nervously he searched his pockets for the card he had scribbled on earlier.

Hensch, Captain William Hensch.

No, that had been somewhere else. The Indians had been in New Mexico, and he—

Erect, impatient, he walked among the cots, then across the black and red basketball court markings to the little table where the Salvation Army woman sat dozing.

“Oh!” She jerked quickly awake when he cleared his throat beside her. “Oh, Sergeant Rose—” Not remembering his name, she smiled. “Did you want something?”

He pressed his fingers together and in a grave, clear voice said, “I cannot sleep. I want to help.”

Her eyes dimmed; then a smile came slowly through them out to him and she nodded. But she did not speak, and Joseph self-consciously straightened his shoulders, slid his hands down the legs of his trousers. It had been New Mexico, he remembered, and there had been a drought, and the Army had been sent onto the reservation to help the Indians.

“All right,” he heard her say, “I’ll show you what to do.”

A bus came in soon after he sat down. He had everything on the table in order. In the center he

placed the long book, where the names of the registrants were written. In the upper left-hand corner he put the pad on which were scribbled addresses of people who had room in their homes for refugees. Across from it, in the upper right-hand corner, he stacked the messages that had come in for people who were missing. He took his own pen from his pocket and put the pencil the Salvation Army woman had been using above the logbook. In the lower right-hand corner he arranged some blank sheets of paper on which to write addresses to give people. Between them and the logbook, in a neat square stack, he placed his personal cards in case they should be needed.

One by one the people came up to the table. Before they got off the bus, the driver told them they had to register or they would be listed as missing. Their impatience annoyed Joseph; he had to squeeze his concentration into tight focus and watch his unsteady hands. He wrote the first two names in the wrong place and had to erase them, and got confused when a woman asked about transportation to Conger. He could only explain that he didn’t know. Then she asked about food and coffee, and he stuttered, ashamed because he hadn’t told the two men coffee and food were being provided at the stand near the doorway to the equipment rooms.

It was tedious work, but his mind steadied as he practiced the routine. When all the passengers had registered, he went over the list carefully to see if he had made any mistakes. While he was squinting at it, one of the evacuees—a young man with a small sharp-chinned face that stuck forward from his long neck—came over to the table. He seemed very

intelligent; listening to him, Joseph relaxed somewhat. The young man had been a college student and was waiting to be drafted. Joseph gave him one of the engraved cards and talked to him in a vague, rambling voice that seemed to fit ideas into context as he let it flow. The young man seemed interested—not in the impatient quick-sighing way of Mrs. Gaitskell—and said he'd come back later, and that he'd enjoyed the conversation.

Another bus came in just after Joseph had turned the lights off on the side of the gymnasium farthest from the table. Deliberately, in a slow voice they would be sure to understand, he told each new arrival how to notify their friends or relatives and where they could get food and find a place to sleep. Then, when he had finished, he went over to the coffee stand, watching the door closely to see that no one entered while he wasn't looking. A lady from Chlorisville who had arrived the day before was serving. The doughnuts were all gone, and there were only a few sandwiches left; Joseph wrote a note for the Salvation Army woman so that she could have more brought in when she returned from her nap.

She came back yawning, but looked rested. He showed her what he had done, and she thanked him and nodded with approval at the neatness of the table.

"I think I can take a nap now," he told her, "but I shall return later tonight." He held the chair for her while she sat down.

She thanked him again and he nodded and walked back to his cot and sat stiffly on the edge of the thin mattress. His limbs ached, and the tightness in his chest had extended upwards into his throat.

Lying back, he closed his eyes. It had been a long day, a very long day; yet he could remember the details of all that had happened. The rain spattered steadily against the flat gymnasium roof. Content, Joseph smiled, remembering Mrs. Gaitskell and how she had wanted to keep him from getting wet. She didn't understand, she simply didn't understand.

He worked two hours out of every six the following day, sleeping between shifts or running little errands for the Salvation Army woman, who told him her name was Mrs. Haley.

His entire consciousness changed, and he was somewhere watching himself, watching the emergence of the cleaner, better self from the old dried-out skin. He felt taller, more active. The scab of feeling alone, an individual, melted, and he became a part of something more complete, obeyed and respected because he was fulfilling a function that was necessary and real. The heavy haze that restricted him to the confines of a tiny circle in present time receded, and he lived with forms and shadows that awakened from his past to become a part of him. Paris—he remembered the city, and the rain, and the rioters swaying below him in the street that bordered the Embassy. And New Mexico and the drought—1926, or maybe 1931—when he was in charge of a detail to freight food and supplies to the starving Apaches.

Throughout the day he worked, and at midnight went to bed. Mrs. Haley awakened him at twenty minutes after four. Noticing how he struggled to get to his feet and slip into shoes and the jacket she had loaned him from Salvation Army supplies, she apologized and said he'd better sleep, but he insisted that it was his turn to work and, smiling and thanking

her, made his way to the table.

He arranged and dusted the tiny surface and drank a cup of coffee. Half-dozing, his hand still on the cup, he listened to the high-tempered whine of an ambulance siren slice the purr of the still-falling rain without realizing that it was coming closer until it shrieked into the parking lot outside the gymnasium.

A dozen wet, weary travelers stumbled through the door behind a uniformed policeman, who waved his hand at Joseph in hurried greeting and went back outside. Their coats and hair were drenched; some of them were coughing. As he wrote the first of the names down, Joseph heard other cars rumble into the parking lot.

By bits and pieces he found out what had happened, overhearing conversations and asking questions as he made his notations.

No longer were they evacuating because of the threat of danger. Suddenly, just after three-thirty, the levee had given way and the full force of the river had swept through the break. There had been barely enough time to flee. Many had been caught in their beds and probably had not escaped.

He could not register them fast enough to keep up with the number of increase. He stopped telling them about sandwiches and coffee and did not try to look their names up to see if any messages had arrived for them. Everyone seemed to be asking questions and shouting, demanding answers that he did not have time enough to oblige. Wet, bewildered, they trooped into the gymnasium, women crying and children whimpering, stomping their feet and draping their wet coats over his neatly assembled lists. He could not speak

loud enough to be heard, and his clumsy fingers became more difficult to control.

Behind his eyes the images snapped and tumbled. He groped, stabbing his pen uselessly at the ledger, while he tried to decipher the voices milling into greater confusion in front of him. A Mexican woman, young but carrying a baby wrapped in a shawl, bent over the table, her brown face distorted and lunging as she screamed. He dropped the pen and could not pick it up. Frantically, he looked over his shoulder, for Mrs. Haley, but a crowd of men blocked his view.

“Mrs. Ha-ley!”

The frightened shriek echoed back from the walls as people jerked away from him, faces suddenly contorted in surprise. For a moment he gaped at them, seeing a swirl of carbines and dark-mustached features blanched by the fire of grenade explosions. He struggled to remember his commands in French, then realized he was not among rioters. He knew who he was and what he had to do.

The table wavered beneath his weight as he climbed upon it, but it held. Cupping his hands, he tried to force a shrill volume from his tight lungs. The people closest to him lifted curious faces as he shouted again.

“Quiet, please!”

A man took up his call, then another. Gradually the clamor diminished, drowned by successive waves of voices calling for order.

“All you men—heads of families—come to this table.” He swallowed; the strain of speaking made his voice reedy and high-pitched. “Form a line. I must have your names. Otherwise you will be listed as missing.”

Carefully he got down from the table, accepting an offered hand, and

while the refugees slogged into line, he straightened the papers on the table, checked to see that his pen would write, and drew a long, dark line across the ledger to separate the pre-flood from post-flood evacuees.

He felt a hand press his shoulder. Looking up, he saw Mrs. Haley, her face glowing with strength.

"I'm going for more food," she whispered, "and to get some other ladies to help. You take care of everything here."

His fingers tightened—between each new entry he had to pause and stretch them—but he did not stop until all the names were put down carefully in his own handwriting on the sheets in front of him. Mrs. Haley returned and left and returned again, bringing a portable radio and attaching it to the outlet in the gymnasium with a long extension cord. Through dawn, into the chill, gloomy overcast of morning, she sat beside him and checked the quests for missing persons with their records, while he took down the names of new arrivals.

For a few minutes, at 9:15, they got a break and leaned back to stretch their arms and shoulders. Joseph sighed, rubbed his hands together, and began to tidily arrange the items on the table. He knew Mrs. Haley was watching him, but withheld looking toward her until his self-consciousness became so great he could not think about what he was doing.

She was smiling. The lines over her forehead seemed deeper, and tiredness pinched little creases around her dark eyes. "You've been a great help," she said, still smiling. "I don't think I've thanked you. I've meant to and I do."

He nodded, accepting her compliment without answering.

"Do you live alone?"

"I live in a home," he replied, voice almost lost in a high, wavering whisper.

"In Coyoke?"

"In Wejichee City."

"Oh?" The one word was both question and dismissal. "That's right," she mused, for the moment introspective, "you came with the others." Her eyes leaped toward him again. "I had forgotten. It seems like you've been here a longer time. I forgot that we're almost strangers." She seemed to be waiting for his reply, but when he didn't speak, she put her expectancy aside. "It's been a terrible thing," she said, "this flood."

"Yes." Joseph pressed his long fingers together and stared at them. "No," he corrected, "a good thing." Sensing her surprise, he gazed more intently at his fingers, trying to build his thoughts into words. But the feeling would not crystallize and he shook his head. "A good thing. I am alive. It has made me feel alive." Choked, he tried to clear his throat. Behind his eyes he could feel a sudden flush and looked quickly away, teeth together, until his breathing was normal again.

Mrs. Haley touched his shoulder. "Yes," she said, her tone more flat and frank than her words seemed to imply, "for some people it is that way."

They talked, going back from their lives into a mutual world of hazy belief where individuality disintegrated from time and became to each of them a shareable thing. He remembered some incidents clearly and her sparse-description comments bridged him into other events, to other faces, and he told her about them and listened to her replies, re-

minded by her words of something more. Slowly a warm glow spread through his chest, and he smiled more frequently, happy and certain in his possession of a full share of being alive. She let him ramble on until a phone call interrupted and she had to leave.

He slept well that afternoon. When he returned to the table, Mrs. Haley told him there had been a bulletin announcing his name broadcast over the radio. "A Mrs. Gaitskell," she explained, "wanted you to call the Alexander State Hospital, but I didn't want to disturb you, so I called instead. I left a message that you were all right."

Gratified that she had not asked them to come after him, Joseph thanked her. Alone at the table he tried to recall Mrs. Gaitskell's face, but could not. She seemed to belong to a part of his life that had never really existed, or perhaps had existed as something he'd read in a book that he could no longer remember very well.

For almost a week the work of registration continued. He lived each minute despite the slackening work and did not mind that his chest burned a little more deeply each time he exhaled. The rain had withdrawn into heavy overcast, and rescue workers were already entering Wejichee City by motor launch and helicopter. Joseph ran errands and helped people locate their families and obtain transportation to outlying points. He did not complain and did not tell Mrs. Haley about the sadness deepening through him as he watched the ordinariness of life begin to envelop the people he was trying to serve.

Each lost name located, each relative restored, was a stone crumbling from his awareness. He had to force

himself to reach a pitch of consciousness and acuity that, for a few days, had been natural.

Instead of napping after Mrs. Haley returned early that evening, he sat on his cot and polished his shoes, remembering the first time he had glossed black service oxfords fifty-two years before. Then, with borrowed clippers, he tried to neatén his crusty fingernails. Later he tried to sleep, but could not and lay staring at the gymnasium ceiling, calm but awake, his back and chest squeezed by the gradually increasing stricture of dull pain. He listened for the rain, then realized it was no longer falling. The silence seemed to explode through his mind.

Only eighteen people remained in the gymnasium. Joseph helped two boys from Coyoke High School tear down the cots and pile blankets, then sat alone picking through a Bible someone had left behind.

The registration table had been pushed back into a storeroom and the lists and ledger given to a man from the Salvation Army headquarters in Chlorisville. The flood was over. On the radio he had heard a city councilman from Wejichee City encourage all of northern California to knuckle in and get set for the long, hard job of rebuilding. But Joseph felt he had nothing to rebuild. His mind was slack and his body ached continually.

He was still sitting on the cot when Mrs. Haley came in shortly after noon. She asked him to have lunch with her—the gymnasium kitchen had been disbanded—and said that he was considered an employee and wouldn't have to pay for his meal.

They did not talk much. Joseph had

soup and half a sandwich and two cups of coffee. Through the restaurant window they could see the crinkled silver of Christmas decorations that lined the street. They looked strange and out of place, as though put up by mistake and left there, forgotten.

"What will you do now?" Mrs. Haley asked.

Wistfully, Joseph smiled, feeling the movement of his mouth pull tautly at his cheeks. "Nothing," he said hesitatingly, "there is nothing more for me to do."

Eyes carefully watching his face, she hinted, "The home—there will be a lot to do there."

"No." Joseph shook his head and pressed his hands flat against the table. His throat was almost closed and his voice whimpered readily, losing the intonation and depth he wanted it to carry. "I'm going to die. My life is over."

Her protest caught on her tongue and wheezed back as she swallowed. "Can't there be anything more for you?"

He shook his head, and they sat together until the shared moments stringily dissolved their association, two travelers parting at a journey's end, unable to bring emotion into their words of good-bye. Finally they got to their feet and walked back to the gymnasium.

Mrs. Haley had appointments and could not stay. Standing in the doorway beside her, Joseph looked at the near-vacant basketball court. The thin light spreading through the overcast outside did not penetrate the windows, and the interior seemed gray and heavy and deserted. At the periphery of his gaze he saw her hesitate, then place her hand on his shoulder, and squeeze it. "You're a good soldier, Joseph," she said. "Thank you very much."

Hands clasped, shoulders erect, he watched her leave. Then he moved stiffly to his cot and sat down. As his eyes closed, he wondered if they would find any use for his shoes. They were not badly worn and might fit someone whose need was greater than his.

More Epiphanies

• John Fandel

Each hour on the hour, one, two, three,
Sleep eased embrace, letting the sleeper be
The dark he closed his eyes upon, to see
The whole white practice for infinity.

We lock the door. We put the task away.
We turn the light off. What we did, we pray
We will not do, and what we said, not say,
Because it is the night that was the day.

Autumn Holiday

• Padraig O Broin

Beside a northern lake where all night long
Loud wind drives chill waves tumbling in to shore
Wakeful awhile I watch the northern lights
Stab at the Bear with white cold blade.

Morning,

And in tall pines a flock of raucous crows
Welcome autumn's sunshine.

A thousand miles

*Or more away the first Atlantic falls
Back from the liner's bow in swirls of foam—
Out of St. Lawrence, up through strait Belle Isle,
Matching their steps to roll or pitch or toss,
Mother and father take the sea road home.*

*Up Belfast Lough—hungry gulls are diving,
Gulls that left the Antrim cliffs at dawn.*

I fling this chilly lake a jagged stone;
Our ancient Gaelic oath I swear: by fire,
Wind, water, earth, I will not die abroad.

Thoughts in Rain

• Larry Rubin

In winter rain, when every bird has tucked
Its head beneath its wing; the world curves
Inward, a concave wetness carved beneath
The clouds. Upward and out there is no place,
And all is self-contained, doubling back
Into interiors, like space. And what
The eye revolves on such a day, the mind
Explores, and every thought comes home, rebounding
Against the density of sky.

One old

Reflection shaped of gray and rain attempts
To slip away and head for heaven, but scrapes
The edge of hollowness, and scoops about
Into the brain. Upon a dripping branch
A bird may sing, framed against a cloud
More white than gray; but the cavity of space,
The skull, keeps the ancient thought, caged
Like a swallow circling in an open room.

The Age of Abstraction in Modern European Literature

• Adolf D. Klarmann

In an address to the Collège de Sète in July, 1935, Paul Valéry said the following: "We have the privilege—or rather the great misfortune—to be present at a profound, rapid, irresistible, and total transformation of all conditions of human activity and life itself." This sentence uttered at the threshold of World War II strikes us as visionary, but it is by no means surprising if we realize that Valéry was only drawing the cogent consequences from developments preceding by decades the fateful present. In expressing the above sentiments, Valéry undoubtedly did not think of political shifts in the quicksand of the time, but being the poet first that he was and the great master and manipulator of form, he certainly must have had in mind also the radical and, indeed, revolutionary changes that had been taking place in the articulation of literary experiences ever since the turn of the century, and especially since World War I. We today are perhaps too inured to take particular notice as to what has been going on. Think for a moment of the shift of style and taste across the watershed of the century mark: on the one side Dickens, Zola, Tolstoy, Ibsen and on the other side Thomas Mann, Proust, Joyce, Pirandello, or Beckett, to give but a few examples. We recognize readily that the difference does not necessarily lie in the social concern, where oddly enough, at least on the surface, the earlier writers seem to have the greater concern, as in the expression, in the form in which the writers communicate. The approach of the late nineteenth century is more strictly realistic and, for that matter, epic. The writer at all times endeavors to tell a story in a direct, even simple language, and his primary concern, all things being equal, is to communicate it directly and leave little or no room for any but his own clearly implied interpretation.

The picture changes radically as soon as we begin to approach our own days. We notice first perhaps the shift in communication. The author seems to be writing more for himself than for the reader. It is as if it did not matter much to him whether he is understood readily or not. Secondly, we might find that what we were accustomed to consider a story no longer exists. We quickly realize this if we try to summarize what is happening in a book by Kafka, or Broch, or Musil, or perhaps Sartre or Camus, or a play by Kaiser or Beckett or even Duerrenmatt. The commitment to reality that motivated the great writers of the second half of the nineteenth century has evidently ceded its priority to something else. Is it unreality, or is it perhaps again a variation on the theme of Romanticism? It would be illusory categorically to negate the question. At best this would give us a very partial answer, but by no means applicable to the most or the greatest of the writers.

For, indeed, there is realism and there is rationalism among them, alas of an entirely different kind.

We might therefore prefer to speak of Metarealism, as the final vision is in the object and beyond it. We quickly become aware of this way of artistic experience in the poetry of a Valéry and Rilke, both of whom seem to wish to submerge their own ego in the object, thereby redeeming the inarticulate to articulation, a situation familiar also to novelists like Proust, for instance, with his poetic adjustment of focus to time remembered or Broch, who condensed Virgil's entire life and artistic frustration and insufficiency into his last few hours, filling an entire book with one long effusive paragraph, nay, indeed one sentence, if a sentence encompasses one thought. Just as this reality is strictly the writer's own, so is the rationalism a rationalism which follows its own causality and logic, which is neither transferable nor applicable to any other but is irrevocably inherent in the experience of the writer. Nothing could be more rational nor more logical than the irrational premises of Kafka's stories, nor could anyone write with greater clarity and classicissity of styles on these irrational situations. Or to come closer to the present, consider the rationality in the irrational world of a Beckett in *Waiting for Godot*, of a Ionesco in *The Chairs*, or Duerrenmatt in *The Marriage of Mr. Mississippi*, or Guenther Grass's *The Tin Drum*, or for that matter Edward Albee's *The American Dream*. But before we pursue this thought any further, let us for a moment return to the quotation from Valéry's speech. He spoke of the total transformation of all conditions of human activity and life itself.

It is an obvious truism that such revolutionary changes must be predicated on certain historical, political, social, and intellectual factors. Briefly to state the precursors of this century, we recognize forces coming to the fore in the second half of the nineteenth century which ushered in an age profoundly different from anything preceding it. This becomes clear if we remember that whatever we call progress with its sundry divided blessings had its inception then. Industrialization, proletarization with its concomitant megalopoles; rampant development of the sciences with its benefits in medicine and comfort of living and its abuses leading to the destruction of these very benefits; the growth of nationalism with its consolidation into large state units and concurrently the rising tendency toward an atomization of supranational states into competing and important separate entities; a philosophical pessimism predicated on the immutability of man's fate in its dependence on heredity and environment and on the other hand, a scientific optimism dangerously bordering on hubris in its imperturbable conviction of being able to create within a foreseeable time a materialistic paradise; Nietzsche's challenge "God is dead" and the pragmatist and positivist false security in agnosticism and atheism; the shortlived glory of the self-appointed mastership of rugged individualism and the first indication of its passing by the rise of the collective; the birth of the capitalist bourgeois society and its challenge in the class-conscious proletariat. And in the arts? A preoccupation with temporal concerns; naturalism with its social denominator and its mimetic tendency of verisimilitude and an aestheticism dedicated to the exclusive cultivation of the beautiful and totally unconcerned with the human

condition. Common to both: the new and dangerous science of the human soul.

This all-too-brief summary brings us to the threshold of World War I. The youths born around 1890 had repudiated the materialism and temporal satiety of their parents and in a newly experienced metaphysical yearning were hoping for the realization of a universal brotherhood and the final elimination of the evils of the established society, which they considered their implacable enemy. The outbreak of the war only proved to them that the old world was in its last agonies. Once its last vestiges were swept away, man could start building a new community of brothers in which poverty, ugliness, and exploitation were unknown. It was a dream that persisted through all the blood and anguish of the trenches, and which received an unexpected and tremendous impetus through the outbreak of the Russian Revolution. At last, they thought, they were witnessing the birth of a new order that would usher in universal peace and happiness. Most of these young men—many of whom were killed or died in the first months of the war—had found their spiritual and artistic roof in Expressionism, a movement which originated in painting and soon absorbed also the writers of the time. It was a shortlived movement but of the greatest importance, not so much because of the greatness of its individual works as because of its lasting impact even on the contemporary scene. The so-called Theater of the Absurd and most of the poetry written since would be quite unthinkable without it. In a way, it was a new *Storm and Stress*, a movement of young people addressing themselves to the youth of the world and knowingly ignoring, indeed despising, the world of the fathers. It was a movement which had rediscovered faith, whose God had never died and who were touchingly optimistic in their secure knowledge of the ultimate victory of goodness. But in their art they were also great revolutionaries and innovators. In their desire to reach out toward their fellow man, they broke down the fetters that would impede the outflow of their overpowering emotions, such as grammar, syntax, or the conventional use of colors in painting as well as in poetry. They were unabashedly sentimental in invoking the brother in man; they emulated the child and the savage in their search for sincerity and directness of expression; they believed ecstatically and they wrote and painted ecstatically. Naturalism, aestheticism, materialism were anathema to them.

Alas, when peace finally came and when things began to take the true shape of the future, they had to admit that they had lost the peace to the indestructible bourgeois and materialist who, to be sure, had withdrawn for a while from view but soon reappeared with his logic of the brutal facts of life, as he called them: the cost of war, the necessity of rebuilding, the obligation of restoring order. Also, what promised to be the sunrise of a new humanity, the Russian Revolution, deteriorated into despotism. And the sought-after brotherhood soon degenerated into the obscenities of Fascism in its black and brown variety only to crush the individual. The disenchantment was complete. The writers turn their attention away from the reality of the present, or they concentrate on the tragic fate of the little man who was being ground down by economic and social forces he could neither understand nor combat. Joyce, Pound, T. S. Eliot, Gide, Thomas Mann, Lagerkvist, Kafka,

Hemingway, Faulkner, Silone—these are some of the names which in their differing remoteness reach varying degrees of abstraction.

We are now witnessing the rise of a new situation, the virulence and destructiveness of which was unimaginable to anybody. Koestler speaks tellingly of the coming to power of the new Neanderthal, and Rudolf Kassner recognizes the rise of the fifth estate, the estate of the criminal. Partially in ignorance and partially in abhorrence of these new forces, the intellectual reaches out for new shelters only to find that an apocalyptic wind has torn the roof from his spiritual house. He is alone and placed in a world he no longer understands, for a purpose he no longer knows or remembers, under an empty sky and in an inexorable cosmos which remains hostile and incomprehensible. In fear and trembling he searches for a faith, he searches for a God who sees and hears him when he calls out. But call as he may, there is only silence, and the echo sounds like mockery. Gone without trace is the early optimism of the Expressionists. A relentless despair prevails which found its harbingers already among the Expressionists, like the tragic poetry of a Georg Trakl or the sneering nihilism of the young Gottfried Benn. Nor do the early works of Franz Kafka hold out hope. The world is a penal colony expiating in an eternal trial transgressions which it is not aware of committing and doomed forever to build a Chinese wall, the extent and purpose of which is never clear, as little as the existence of the emperor who has given the order to build and who has sent a messenger who never arrives. And life itself is an incomprehensible chain of causalities the beginning and the end of which remain unknown. In a letter to his friend Max Brod, Kafka writes: "People fall from scaffolds into machines like drunkards, all the beams topple over, all gradings are loosened, ladders slip; whatever is picked up falls down, whatever one sets up makes one stumble; and the thought of all these young girls in the china factories incessantly throwing themselves up the stairs with the towers of dishes in their arms could give one a severe migraine."

The age of the Neanderthal is spreading fast. The cynicism and sophistry of the fifth estate take over, and as if mesmerized by the stare of this cobra, civilized Europe cringes and submits without resistance. The holocaust of World War II is upon man, another war so shortly after the one that was to make all wars forever impossible and the world safe for democracy. Again the youth in the western world rises for survival and in defense of the simplest decencies. The war is fought with a fury and ruthlessness unthinkable in other ages. At long last the enemy is prostrate; again peace is here, and again it is lost. There is, however, a tremendous difference in the attitude of the youth of 1914 and the youth of 1941. The first started out for the war with all the illusions and hopes of the crusader who once and for all is bringing redemption to a corrupt world. No such enthusiasm, no real hope or optimism of such almost religious fervor motivates the younger generation. To them, the war is a dirty job that has to be done so that man may be left in the possession of some personal freedom and some simple decencies. Little if any glory is left in this age-old game of childish men. Churchill's "blood, sweat, and tears" encompasses everything that awaits the decent warrior, but fight he must if human dignity is to preserve even a semblance of itself. He had few illusions when he went in, and he has kept even fewer as he came out. To be

sure, the old enemy was finished. But almost immediately new forces make themselves felt, new vanities, new self-seekers who in the name of their countries bloat their own petty egos.

We shall not be too surprised to find that the tone of the literature before as after the last war was on about the same level of disenchantment and existential despair. We have just used for the first time the term *existential*, though its concept is an old one. In a way, the ancient tragedy, especially that of Euripides, knew this condition, as did the Book of Job. Pascal is an admitted forebear, as is Kierkegaard. Strindberg knows of its torments and hopes, as does Unamuno and Kafka. But, in a way, it was the call of the past generation to raise it to a dominant philosophy. The condition is presented classically by Camus:

A world that can be explained by reasoning, however faulty, is a familiar world. But in a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels like a stranger. His is an irremediable exile, because he is deprived of memories of a lost homeland as much as he lacks the hope of a promised land to come. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly contributes to the feeling of absurdity. (*The Myth of Sisyphus*, Paris, 1942).

To the void and emptiness of existence in a world without point or plan or purpose, in a fate without logic, intelligence, or mercy, the Existentialist posits a self-imposed teleology, a fate and a goal of his own making, free, because it is chosen in an entirely free will. He ordains a sense where there intrinsically is none and a community where there is but an incoherent and inchoate disjointedness of asocial individuals. Sartre's world knows no illusions, but at the same time it realizes that in order to survive—for existence is the only answer to nonexistence—it must proceed as if there were a sense and a purpose. And, lo and behold, we witness the rebirth of a kind of hero the like of which we had not known in literature before. Orestes in Sartre's *The Flies* voluntarily assumes the guilt and the necessity of a personal expiation for the sake of the People. Nekrassov submits to the purge for the sake of the survival of the Party, and the "respectful Prostitute" is thrown into a fate of protecting a Negro. An even more cogent and convincing chiffer we derive from Camus, and that is the figure of Sisyphus. In Camus's interpretation, the Greek Titan, who by the inexorable whim of the gods was condemned in eternity to push up a stone which always rolls down when he reaches the peak, becomes the symbol of defiant humanity. He accepts his fate though he does not comprehend it, and he defies the wanton cruelty of the gods with his smile as he proceeds to push up the stone again and again. What in itself as an act is utterly absurd receives a form of glorification in the knowing acceptance and enduring smiling defiance. Unless man learns—and learn he must—to free his fate from the accident of existence, he has but one way open to him, that of suicide. And Camus passionately opposes this defeatist way out. It accomplishes nothing, it leads nowhere, it is cowardly and unpardonable. Existence imposes an obligation to exist, and existing forces man to come to terms with life, but only at his own terms.

Neither Sartre nor Camus knows God, or at least Camus is killed before he could accept Him. Yet this Godlessness is not inherent in Existentialism. For who could believe more fervently than Pascal the Catholic or Kierkegaard the Protestant? The believing Existentialist, however, is no longer of the rational, humanist, enlightened variety so prevalent in the last century. His faith is much closer to the faith of the Middle Ages or the dawn of Christianity of Tertullian. It no longer holds that *credo quia cogito*, but rather *credo quia absurdum*. The Protestant Kierkegaard, the Catholic Maritain, and the Jew Buber meet in a religious Existentialism. Are we then justified in expecting a new religious wave among modern writers? Hardly, or at least not yet. Too many compromises with the devil have been made, too desperate was the cry that went unheard; too deeply involved with himself is still the writer humbly to accept a higher wisdom that mocks his comprehension. "God has no face, has no ears! We do not hear the heartrending mute cries of our neighbor," says Wolfgang Borchert, who died in his twenties as a result of the Nazi brutality during the war and the bureaucratic stupidity of our own Occupation officials. And even where we find, especially among the older writers, a deep religiosity, the path leads through evil and sin to God and is full of pitfalls. George Bernanos, Julien Green, Francois Mauriac, Elisabeth Langgaesser, and the convert Alfred Doeblin are fully conscious of it. Two statements might illustrate this best: one from Mauriac's *The Mask of Innocence*: "Those who seem dedicated to evil were perhaps chosen before all others. For the depth of their fall measures the extent to which they have betrayed the task destined for them." And the other from Doeblin's *Immortal Man*: "Satan walks amongst us, so much is clear. We must not let the brightness of daylight fool us. . . . What content could our existence have, and what task could it give us by which to justify the gloom of our life, unless it were to purify and raise ourselves in preparation for the liberation from evil, from entanglement, and from the shameful humiliation by evil." There are but two sweet voices among the positive champions of God, the nun and convert Simone Weil and the Austrian writer Franz Werfel, who though *extra muros* accepted the Catholic faith more fully and ardently than any one born to it. At the danger of being accused of contradicting myself, let me nevertheless express a deep hunch that the writer having run the full course of negation and nihilism will find his way to a renewed acceptance of faith. There are indications aplenty. Let us listen to just one that comes from the pen of a young American writer: It is Lionel Wiggam's first part of his poem "Conclusions":

He climbs a hill and turns his face
Impudently into space.
He builds a tower that he may climb
Higher still and measure time.
He fixes Vega, contemplates
The moon; assembling what he saw
He arrogantly makes a law.
But never can he build a tower
From which to see what passions are.
He cannot fix and name the course

His own heart takes, though he explores
The whole amazing length of heaven.
He is forever baffled: even
Though he knows how worlds evolve,
Himself he cannot solve.

Having come this far, let us now retrace our steps to the beginning of our discourse. We were trying to arrive at some sort of definition of abstraction in literature and gave as one aspect of it its remoteness from reality, a concept which holds for many divergent paths of writing. We shall try to demonstrate how, especially since the end of the preceding century, certain writers have prepared in form as well as in content the kind of abstraction we have in mind.

Perhaps the first clean break with tradition is Strindberg's drama, and here not so much his so-called naturalistic writings as his fantastic plays. The most revolutionary in our opinion is his *The Dream Play*. The concept of a play inside of a dream is, to be sure, an old device of the playwright. Calderon, Lope, the Romanticists, Grillparzer, and many others practiced it. The newness here is its completely revolutionizing liberation of the stage as an active and important part of the play. Here the stage actually acts before our eyes, thereby assuming the role of an articulate symbol which takes over where speech fails. You recall the castle that rests in dirt, the inside of which is at the same time the prison of the officer and which, in the end, blossoms forth in a huge chrysanthemum. Or the constant shift in the purpose of certain things, as for instance the passing of time shown by the rapid changes in the appearance of the tree. Or the function of Fair Strand and Foul Strand. Or the change from the lawyer's office to the interior of the church. The technique of the dream, almost scientifically observed, is translated into a constantly moving stage action. This together with *To Damascus* is at the same time also the first example of what the Expressionists, learning from Strindberg and after him Brecht and especially Duerrenmatt, call the *Stationsdrama*, the play in stations and no longer in acts. The allusion to the Stations of the Cross need not be entirely fortuitous. For here as almost everywhere in Strindberg, we experience the agony of man who finds himself trapped in a world of nightmares. The fact that they are of his own making to a large extent does not make them the more tolerable. The daughter of Indra, in a peculiar way a Christlike figure, must witness the pointless suffering of man and then return at the end to her father to report what she has seen and experienced. Will this change things? Perhaps in a dream or in a fairy tale. But not even such a possibility is seriously entertained by Strindberg. Little if any concession is made here to the tradition of the drama. And little if any concession is made by Unamuno to the tradition of the novella or the novel. Borrowing the title from Cervantes, he presents us in his *Exemplary Novels* with a set of three stories in which the entire concentration is on presenting the singularity of a starkly limited number of fates. With an amazing single-mindedness, Unamuno avoids the slightest diversion from his purpose, thereby creating a leanness of prose not unlike the Spanish body. And in every instance he pits a determination of brutal instincts for survival against a world in which society and custom have whittled down the will. There is not

the slightest indication of a description of nature or a rendition of thought which is not immediately directed to its final and exclusive purpose. Mada-riaga calls them "spiritual skeletons." And a different yet kindred situation do we encounter in an amazing bit of writing in his novel *The Mist*. In a completely daring adaptation of the romantic irony of the late eighteenth century, which the scholar of German literature knew only too well, Unamuno appears in the story as author and as God, who has created his own characters as a whim and whose end he decrees in spite of the intercession of the characters. Again we are in a completely anonymous place and time, but whereas in *Three Exemplary Novels* there is only bitter seriousness, *The Mist* exudes a sense of humor and irony which borders on the black. Unamuno's most personal and hence unsystematic philosophical contribution is his wonderful treatise, *The Tragic Fate of Man*, the fate of the man of flesh and blood to whose vital force there is no more horrendous thought than the concept of death as finality, and who therefore creates the necessity of an immortality and from it the absolute proof of the existence of God. Here we see abstraction in our definition carried to an unheard of degree, abstraction in form as well as in the eschatological idea.

Pirandello moves in a world not unlike that of Unamuno. However, to him, man's tragedy lies in his eternal and futile quest for self-realization and for a permanent mold in the constant flow of shapes in his own personality. His self-conscious and self-possessed soul is forever on the lookout for a true content and a lasting truth and for a redemption in which it really does not believe—shades of Strindberg—as little as it accepts any permanent values, for they all are relative and are meaningful only if one is prepared to accept them as such. Man's lot is forever argued as to its real and metaphysical justification, and guilt and innocence are as true as they are false. Failing in finding the absolute truth in the maze of all the personal truths, he escapes into a self-made reality of unreality in which he then fortifies himself with an impenetrable armor. This is the solution of the father in his *Six Characters in Search of an Author* and in the madness of *Henry IV*. Every reality within and without is questionable. Man never is what he thinks he is, nor what others think him to be, nor what he is now as contrasted with what he was yesterday. Forever changing, filled with a kaleidoscopic wealth of variations and inscrutable potentialities, he tries to assume a place in his own life, in the group, in time. Man's existential tragedy lies in the irredeemable and opaque capsulation of his ego. Though on the surface Pirandello observes the amenities and the traditions of the stage, his acquiescence in the norm is only skin deep, for while the vessel may be conventional, the brew it contains is heady.

Realization of one's own being is literally also the answer Edouard the writer of and inside *The Counterfeitors* gives to young Bernard. It is the law by which the protean Gide lives, and which he strives to achieve by the gratuitous act and the permanent disponibility, that is, by the immediate and intuitive reaction to a situation regardless of causality and consequences and the permanent openness to life whatever it may bring. Though religion is much in the center of discussion, Gide's own attitude because or in spite of his Calvinism is rather uncommitted outside his avowal of a pre-Pauline

Christianity in which Christ holds out love and happiness here and not fear and punishment. Christianity too means a permanent disponibility. But evil is real. It assumes a strong role as the destructive force and the voice of temptation to wickedness. It becomes identical with a postulated Satan whose mission to trip man is never finished, and who is an integral part of every human soul. It would be futile to try to even indicate the wealth and intricacies of the ideas in the novel *The Counterfeiters*. As an experiment in form, it is an unprecedeted tour de force. Gide attempts, among other things, to emulate the fugue. He writes a novel—and, by the way, only *The Counterfeiters* among his many prose works are given that term by him—in which he writes about a novelist who is writing a novel called *The Counterfeiters*, and who keeps a diary in which he discourses about his problems involved in writing the novel and in which the figures who surround the writer also are figures of the novel. We recognize the bridges which lead to both Unamuno and Pirandello. And in the struggle of the Angel and Satan for the possession of the soul of Bernard, we move close to the world of Thomas Mann. *The Magic Mountain* is an important landmark in the growth of what we like to call the abstract novel. It follows superficially the tradition of the German development novel, in which, as in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, the hero remains passive while certain educational forces are brought to play upon him. This is the situation of Hans Castorp, the hero, or rather the non-hero, for the possession of whose soul, as it were, humanism, irrationalism, the lure of sickness and death, the sweet smile of corruption are vying, and who in the magnificent chapter "Snow" comes to the realization that for the sake of goodness, man must never cede to death the dominance over his thoughts. Alas, he forgets this precious synthesis and rushes down to the valley to war, only to disappear as an individual in the anonymity of the uniform. *The Magic Mountain* is a tremendous novel in which the whole intellectual world of prewar Europe is summoned up for a last review in the rarefied and insulated world of the sanatorium in Davos. Action as action is of little importance. With awesome learning, ideas are pitted against each other in breathtaking duels. Discourses, dialogues in extensive chapter lengths, are balanced with the skill of a great master and a great ironist, for in all this deadly seriousness, the critical touch of irony, romantic and otherwise, is never missing. Here, too, a new form is born, in which the relativity of the time concept is all important, as it has ever been since Bergson and—as we have briefly alluded to it—in Proust. This relativity retains its impact in the major works of Mann, certainly in his *Joseph* novels and in *Doctor Faustus*.

The time concept of a dream or a nightmare is the hallmark of the novels of Franz Kafka. We do believe that the approach from the dream is perhaps one safe clue to the allegorical maze of his oeuvre. We have in passing alluded to Kafka on several occasions. Suffice it now to point once more to his strong mythogenic power which, to be sure, has some precursors in Strindberg and among the Expressionist poets like Georg Heym, which nevertheless bears his very own and unmistakable imprint. His influence on the generation following World War II is too well known to dwell upon.

Since we are limiting ourselves to modern literature on the continent,

we shall have no occasion to discuss, even ever so briefly, the immense factor of a James Joyce or, for that matter, the great Americans. However, we must not fail at least to note their profound influence on all the writing since. This is particularly true of the novel of postwar Germany in as disparate a group of writers as Boell, Grass, and Johnson. In all instances we see not only a *weltanschauliche* affinity, but also a will to stylistic experimentation which transcends the purely rational or the purely aesthetic.

Only gradually do we come to realize the impact that the Expressionist drama had on the development of modern play writing. Georg Kaiser must be mentioned in the very first place when we come to speak about the Expressionist drama. For not only did he write the most stageworthy and lasting plays, but he also was responsible to a large degree for the form the new drama was taking. We have already mentioned the Stations drama. Its impact becomes especially clear when we consider the plays of Brecht with their demand for the epic theater which substitutes a progression of more or less independent scenes for the inner architecture of a conventional drama. There is little doubt in our mind that Kaiser's *The Citizens of Calais* is the greatest play of the first half of our century. Its greatness does not only lie in its theme of the search for the new man, but also in the masterful handling of the stage and of the masses. The search for the new man is the core of all his writings, the *Gas* trilogy as well as his *Alcibiades Saved* and all the many others which in spite of occasional appearance to the contrary confirm Kaiser's faith in mankind and God.

We have mentioned Brecht's epic theater as an innovation which he owes to the Expressionists, whose possibly youngest member he was and for that reason devoid of their metaphysical optimism. His development goes from nihilism to an *engagement* with the extreme Left, from a completely free attitude to a didactic form which the party member defines as alienation, namely the intention of presenting the characters in such a light that instead of provoking in the viewer an Aristotelian empathy, he would arouse his indignation, his alienation, at the character's failure to act in order to set things aright. This intention is recognizable in his best plays, in *Galileo*, in *Mother Courage*, in *The Good Woman of Setzuan* or in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. But since the poet Brecht is infinitely more potent than the political thinker, he achieves the very opposite of *Verfremdung*, alienation, by arousing in us deep sympathy rather than scorn. In the final analysis, it seems to us that the main point in Brecht's plays is the necessity of survival, for no matter how admirable and great a dead hero may be, he is dead and can no longer be of any benefit to himself or the world.

This importance of survival, Brecht shares with one of the most gifted of the younger writers in the German tongue, the Swiss Duerrenmatt. While the mighty and powerful come and go and while they have the power to exploit and kill, the little fellow, the beggar Akki in his *An Angel Comes to Babylon*, has the will and the strength to run away and to take with him Kurubi, that divine spark of beauty and inspiration. As long as he lives, beauty will also survive, while the heroes finish each other off. Both Brecht and Duerrenmatt owe a great deal to the folk play, especially of the Viennese variety, though Brecht insists that he has learned from the Chinese theater.

In both of the playwrights we recognize a new dramatic form which follows pretty much the epic prescription and which introduces with different purposes in mind the monologue, sung or spoken, in which the character sometimes, literally stepping out of his role, comments on a point which was raised in the action. This device is used with great skill by Duerrenmatt, and only lately does he seem to have returned to the more conventional form. In spite of many similarities between the two, Duerrenmatt insists that if he owes anybody a literary debt, it is to the Viennese folk playwright and actor Nestroy. Duerrenmatt's work is predicated on the intrinsically tragic sense of the comedy and the cognition that only a tragicomedy can do justice to our age. Except for some early surrealist prose, Duerrenmatt has made the tragicomedy his most consistent vehicle.

We are almost finished with our consideration of the age of abstraction. Needless to say, the names not mentioned here are legion. How could it be otherwise? But before we close, let us at least mention one other form of abstraction or rather an anti-abstraction. We are thinking of Franz Werfel, who, far from shunning realism, seeks it out in exciting plots in plays and novels with the one explicit purpose to present hidden behind a busy and vivid facade the allegories of the eternal metaphysical mysteries. The age of abstraction in all its many forms, in all its search for an answer is, after all, also the age which struggles for a new man and a new faith. Let us close on this note with a few sentences from Faulkner's Nobel Prize acceptance speech, which I found only in German, and which I am attempting to translate: "The tragedy of our time is universal and world-pervading fear . . . But I refuse to believe in the end of humanity . . . I believe man will not only endure, he will also prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among all creatures possesses an untiring voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of sympathy, of sacrifice, of suffering."

Admission

• Mother Mary Anthony, S.H.C.J.

I shall miss the brief twilight and the gray
 Quiet morning, I think, once we've begun
 Unending glory, everlasting day
 Apocalyptic analogues of sun
 Argue for shadow (small as a man's hand)
 To modulate the brilliance and discern
 Each dozen dozen thousand candid band
 Signed and still singing while the heavens burn.
 The registration isn't quite complete,
 For laggards like me hang about the gate;
 There's all eternity to get a seat,
 There really isn't any time to wait
 Until the Lamb unseals his special book
 And grants the hesitant a human look.

Alien

• Padraig O Broin

Tonight an April moon looks down
 On alien ways I yet must walk:
Now, too, above that ancient town
 Where I was born and learned to talk
She rides as high. Ah, to be there
 This spring—that even here is fair.

How many times moon's quiet light
 Bathed all Iona's blessed strand
Where out of sleep at middle night
 You rose to pray—but toward that land
Long gazing, stood. Too far for eye
 Though moon, or sun itself, rode high.

Too far. But there you grew to man:
 And when, blindfolded, you were brought
To Druimceat—facing angered clan
 For Eire's arrogant poets fought—
Under the bandaged, quivering lid
 You kept the oaks of Derry hid.

Yours that gray eye looking back
 To Derry, Derry of the oaks:
My heart an alien—ashes pack,
 And all its generous fire now chokes . . .
Colmcille, speak with him! Say
 Till I am home I cannot pray.

Lineage

• George Keithley

Suet fell. *Satan's snow*, said
These few tracking
The caved Appalachian
Rise, downslope, bed
Of the Ohio, men
Laying shallow their dead.

Dead to the cold blue joy
A March sun blares
In the naked elms. *Rest*
Now with your boy.
And settling the warm west
Kentucky, Illinois

Heat, and the buzzing town
 Under the gnats—
 Gnats cloud the lighted park,
 Waft, and sink down
 The yellow summer dark
 Where the dry couples frown,

They sit more old than wise,
 Less old than spent;
 While these stir—brush a hand
 Or with dreamed cries
 Drowse by the green bandstand,
 The gnats sail near their eyes.

Statement and Illustration

• Burton L. Carlson

Winter is coming.
 The bluejays cry,
 blue flashing loud
 across blue sky.
 Blue loudly blue.
 Blue blue-and-white.
 Louder than bluejays.
 Perfect loud.

Winter is coming.
 The grass is green.
 More green than spring
 this grass is green.
 More gladly green
 than grass last spring.
 O perfectly this grass
 is glad.

Winter is coming.
 The leaves are red.
 A thousand, thousand
 times are red.
 More red these leaves
 than lips are red!
 More perfectly
 these red lips die!

The Oar

● W. Arthur Boggs

The rocky mountain trails and wind-swept lands
were never meant for feet
which frequently had clenched
the rough hewn deck in stormy seas,
nor was his arm accustomed to the oar
he carried rather than the bow
that only he could string, but still he went,
a lone and friendless man,
until at last he came among a savage race
threshing their grain with slender rods,
as he paused to watch their work,
their leader questioned him about his flail.
Beckoning all that crowd to come to him,
he made his mystic rites before his oar
as in his sacrificial dance he lept.
Poseidon satisfied, Odysseus wept.

Two Haikus

● Francis Lehner

Memorial Day

The rose I plant on
her grave will wither, thorns of
memory grow green.

Lover in Autumn

Romances go the
way of leaves—I am a lone
tree bare in the wind.

Contributors

H. E. FRANCIS writes from Emory University, Atlanta, that he is midway in a novel, the end of which he hopes to see in Mendoza, Argentina," where he expects to spend next year lecturing at the Universidad Nacional de Cuyo. His newest short story will appear in *The Transatlantic Review*, June 1965. A collection of eleven of his stories will appear in Buenos Aires this year in Spanish translation. KAY LYNN WELLS writes from her home in Des Moines, Iowa, that her poem is the first one she has had published. She is married, has a little girl, and works for an insurance company. JOHN C. HOY has had his poems printed in previous issues of **four quarters** and in other magazines. He is assistant to the President of Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut, and also Dean of Admissions. SISTER MAURA, S.S.N.D. is professor of English at Notre Dame of Maryland College, Baltimore. LARRY RUBIN has had his poems published in *Yale Review*, *Sewanee Review*, *Commonweal*, and other magazines; this is his first appearance in this magazine. ROBERT JOE STOUT has had his poetry appear in *The Beloit Poetry Journal*, *The New York Times*, and *New Athenaeum*; his story is his first published fiction. He lives in Kentucky. JOHN FANDEL has written for *Commonweal* and *The New Yorker* and is on the faculty of Manhattan College, New York. PADRAIG O BROIN is editor of *Canadian Poetry*, Toronto, and author of *Than Any Star*. This is his first appearance in **four quarters**. ADOLF D. KLARMANN, Professor, Department of Germanic Languages and Literature, the University of Pennsylvania, delivered his article in a somewhat modified form to the faculty and students of the modern language department of La Salle College. MOTHER MARY ANTHONY, S.H.C.J. is professor of English at Rosemont College. GEORGE KEITHLEY lives in Chico, California. BURTON L. CARLSON lives in New Haven. W. ARTHUR BOGGS has appeared in **four quarters** many times during the past several years. FRANCIS LEHNER is an associate professor of English at Loras College and editor of *Delta Epsilon Sigma Bulletin*; he has been published in *The English Journal* and other magazines.

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